



Sharing education in divided societies: Transferring the learning from Northern Ireland

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Recent ethnic and racial disturbances in Britain, and more serious inter-ethnic conflicts in other parts of the world, have been reflected in more fragmented education systems (the former Yugoslavian states offer a good example). The challenge for Governments and educators is how to maximize the potential that schools can provide for enhancing inter-group relations, whilst at the same time, protecting the rights of minority groups to have their children educated within a particular faith or ideological tradition. In this paper we report on a programme for Sharing Education that has been established in Northern Ireland. The aim of the programme is to promote more harmonious relations between Protestant and Catholic pupils attending schools that are separated on ethno-religious lines. Referring to research evidence, we argue that the programme is effective because it affords sustained inter-group contact and it foregrounds educational (rather than reconciliation objectives). Based on our experience of working to develop and implement a similar programme in the Republic of Macedonia, we also reflect on the transferability of the Sharing Education Programme to other societies that experience ethnic division and conflict.